



**Empowering Churches with Solutions to Simplify
Complex Diocesan and Parish Church Management**

ParishSOFT Customer Success Story:

Pax Christi

The Archdiocese of Saint Paul-Minneapolis

ParishSOFT®

Pax Christi Catholic Community is located in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul-Minneapolis. Over 3,000 families and nearly 10,000 members call this parish home. A historically young parish, it is built upon the lived mission of Vatican II: welcoming all as “leaders in faith for service to the world.”

Cognizant of their baptismal call to be leaders according to their gifts and talents, Pax Christi emphasizes leadership through service as the path to discipleship. In addition to 19 full-time staff, hundreds fill volunteer positions. Thousands also offer their gifts through the parish-wide Gift Inventory, ready to serve when the need arises. Parishioners’ generosity of time, talent and treasure enable the parish to carry the Gospel through 115 unique ministries, events and special projects.

Annual Stewardship Renewal

In support of mission-centered living, the parish yearly hosts the Annual Stewardship Renewal. The initiative focuses on all three aspects of stewardship: time, talent and treasure. Parishioners are invited to consider giving their time and talent through yearlong or short-term volunteer commitments, in addition to making or renewing financial pledges for the coming year.

Parishioners are also encouraged to participate in the parish Gift Inventory. The inventory enables parishioners to offer particular talents or areas of expertise to the parish for special projects or on an as-needed basis. This allows parish staff and ministry leaders to draw upon qualified and interested volunteers for tasks such as photographing the First Communion Mass, providing carpentry assistance, or offering expertise in the area of accounting or finance. Both types of ministries, regular ministry roles (lectors, altar-servers, catechists, etc.) and gift-based offerings, are tracked and maintained in their ParishSOFT Ministry Scheduler program.

Parishioner response is robust. During the fall alone, the parish may receive 700-800 time and talent forms, in addition to pledge cards and submissions to the Gift Inventory.

The Need for Trusted Volunteers

It happened that one year the Annual Stewardship Renewal ran concurrently with religious education preparations. With administrative assistants otherwise occupied, no one was available to help Mary Kennedy, Director of Stewardship and Development, with the labor-intensive process of entering time and talent forms and new pledges into their ParishSOFT system.

From her past experiences volunteering, Kennedy knew that by establishing appropriate role parameters and safeguards, vetted volunteers could be entrusted with the entry of sensitive stewardship and personal ministry information. The timing conflict of the two parish initiatives left her convinced of the need to develop trusted volunteers at Pax Christi to be able to help in this capacity.

Kennedy notes that the increased need for volunteers, including volunteers able to assist in the parish office, is also a sign of the times. With limited availability of priests and increasing responsibilities for parish staff, the laity is called upon as never before to embrace an active role in the Church. The incorporation of lay leadership is a part of Pax Christi’s founding values and parishioners are welcome and necessary partners in realizing Pax Christi’s mission and vision.

Recruiting Candidates

After creating separate job descriptions, the parish turned to the Gift Inventory. Pax Christi requires trusted volunteers in the areas of offering and pledges, and time and talent; although both roles require attention to detail and data entry, they recognize that special care must be paid to those working with donations. As a result, filtered searches of their Ministry Scheduler program (parishioners' offerings through the Gift Inventory are recorded in Ministry Scheduler) focus on Certified Public Accountants (CPAs). CPAs take an oath to maintain confidentiality in financial matters and are more likely to have the qualifications needed to help them succeed in the volunteer role.

Discernment

After identifying potential candidates, the parish reaches out via phone or email. Candidates are invited to meet with parish staff to continue to discern whether the role might be a good fit. Meeting with candidates helps staff to more accurately assess role suitability, including whether the person is able to maintain confidentiality.

Pax Christi acknowledges each person has unique aptitudes, which extend to the ability to work discreetly with parishioner information. Rather than avoid a potentially awkward topic, parish staff are forthright in addressing this important point with candidates. Likewise, initial meetings provide the opportunity to honestly evaluate whether the candidate has this aptitude or if he might be better suited to another role.

Safeguards

Once the parish and volunteer candidate feel confident proceeding, Pax Christi is adamant on taking proper steps to protect data and safeguard the trust parishioners and visitors have placed in the parish. Volunteers who work with financial information are required to have a background check, all volunteers must sign a code of conduct to be renewed every three years, and child and vulnerable adult safety training is required for those who may interact with those individuals.

Permissions

Pax Christi also holds to best practices by setting appropriate, individual permissions for volunteers in their ParishSOFT software. Volunteers each have their own login and the necessary permissions for their role only. Says Kennedy, "I don't have to worry about anything because of the great permissions set up in ParishSOFT." Honing in on permissions avoids potential mishaps and prevents volunteers (or staff) from going into an area or performing a task that they shouldn't.

Confidentiality

Prior to their starting, Kennedy again addresses with volunteers the necessity of confidentiality. The message when it comes to every parishioner's personal information is essentially, "You need to forget what you see

here.” Volunteers are reminded of this obligation at least yearly and Kennedy observes that they appreciate and respect the emphasis placed on protecting parishioner privacy.

Redirecting Volunteers

Oversight and review is an integral part of parish office operations. It has been the case that after reviewing their work, parish staffs have had to redirect a volunteer to another ministry. Although never comfortable, Kennedy notes that most volunteers’ response has been essentially, “Thank God!” Eager to serve, they had been trying to make it work, but were relieved to know there were other options!

Handled with sensitivity and compassion, even these interactions were an opportunity to affirm parishioners in their service and move them into a role that better suited their natural gifts and abilities.

Current Status and Best Practices

At any time the parish will generally have 4-6 trusted volunteers, 1-2 working with offering and pledges, and 3-4 working in time and talent. Most positions are seasonal to reflect the summer slow down. Due to the amount of data entry needed, weekly service is usually in increments of 1-2 hours at a time. Parish staffs have found this is the ideal period of time before accuracy begins to suffer.

Regarding advice for parishes interested in engaging trusted volunteers, Pax Christi emphasizes the need to start with a clearly defined job description. In addition, success will depend upon having a designated staff person to effectively train and work with the volunteer. For their part, Pax Christi is careful to communicate to current staff that the need for trusted volunteers is not due to a lack on the part of staff! Rather it is a natural response to parish need, and an opportunity to both engage parishioners and assist the parish office.

Pax Christi also recommends using ParishSOFT web-based software because of the system’s sound internal controls, easy data entry process, and online tools that assist with parish administration and ministry. Pax Christi considers ParishSOFT applications as a “partner” in the work of the parish office – a role in which the people of ParishSOFT are happy to serve.

Conclusion

Pax Christi’s intentional and thoughtful implementation of trusted volunteer service has born good fruit in the parish community. By utilizing the Gift Inventory and a thorough vetting process, volunteers are affirmed by giving of their talents in a way that is meaningful and appropriate to their gifting. Likewise, parish staffs have received their assistance as a gift and are freed to greater depth of service in their own roles. Together they make visible Pax Christi’s vision – to be a community of faith in service to each other, the parish, and the world.

Additional Information

ParishSOFT has helped thousands of parishes and dioceses implement ParishSOFT’s online solutions. For an analysis of your software and services needs, please visit parishsoft.com or call us at 866-930-4774 x7.

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